

green flame



Joan Buckley

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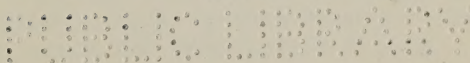
green flame

(Third Edition)

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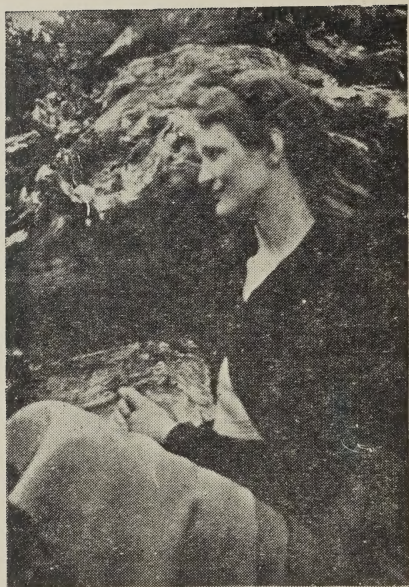
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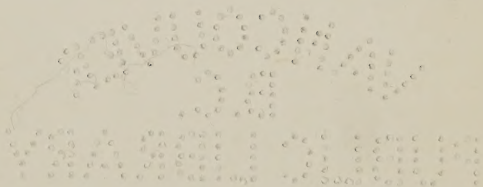


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Joan Buckley



FOREWORD

JOAN BUCKLEY and I were once great comrades.

Joan had a foot that was as rhythmic as the swaying of young willows — the trees that evoked these beautiful lines from her pen:

“The willow rises from her shadowed base,
A moveless fountain sprayed against the moon,
A tree enchanted under starry space;
Enchanted still, a leafy rain at noon.”

Joan and I danced together in my opera, “In Sunny France,” and I can still hear that wilderness of hands which applauded her clever motion. She was then under ten years of age !

I went far away from Armstrong, B.C., where our poet then lived and a little later I heard the sad news that my little comrade would not dance again. But was the news such sad news after all? Perhaps, had Joan lived the life of an ordinary child, this little book, which contains dance-rhythms for the soul, might never have been written.

The soul of Joan Buckley, the woman, is an uncomplaining one. That there is no spirit of rebellion in these poems is proof to me that a great spirit sings them.


Joan Buckley's letters to me are so full of gratitude that they bring back the lines of Wordsworth:

“Alas, the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning.”

I am very proud that I was asked to write this brief foreword.

The girl who can write, “And the rain, like a rosary, slips through her hands,” is a true poet. And I sincerely hope that another wilderness of applause, a greater one by far than the one I heard in Armstrong, greets this little garland of song.

Wilson MacDonald



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THE TRILLIUM

IT ROSE through leaf-mould, green and curled,
Into the world of Spring;
And out of wrappings cunningly furled
Was born a miraculous thing.

A dream of Nature's artistry,
Fashioned under the sod,
Modelled of gold and ivory;
A sign of the Triune God.

Fruit of the rich earth's sleeping,
Conceived in the darkest days;
A green flame upward leaping;
A three-fold shout of praise.

GREEN SPELL

THE willow rises from her shadowed base,
A moveless fountain sprayed against the moon,
A tree enchanted under starry space;
Enchanted still, a leafy rain at noon.

A fated princess, charmed by muttered rune;
She bows alone, and weeping, broods and grieves
For little feet once free in jewelled shoon,
And golden hair now changed to drooping leaves.

HEART'S GARDEN

I KNOW a garden in a lonely dell
Where peacocks flaunt their splendid,
sleepless eyes,
And the clear tinkle of a fairy bell
Makes a faint music where the fountains rise.
Where slender birches spread their silver hair
To lure the pensive glances of the moon,
Are nightingales that pour enchanting woes
In mellow mourning on the midnight air;
Where the pale poppy sways beside the rose,
Till, spelled in glimmering magic, none can tell
Which is the lovelier, so their beauty glows.

Night lingers long before the gates of dawn,
And day approaches slowly as night goes.
Between the lights of evening and of morning
I rest with folded wings where no man knows.
I have a key to this enchanted place,
But when I enter like a bird that's homing,
The gate swings close and opens to no other,
Though my heart aches for weary feet a-roaming.

WINTER WAITING

BESIDE my window a cherry tree,
Awaits the Spring to set her free.
Her heart a cradle of embryo leaves;
Birdless and silent under the eaves,
Alone and naked and cold she stands,
And the rain, like a rosary, slips through her hands,
Though winsome in Spring with blossoming bough,
All spangled with crystal, she's exquisite now.

THE GARDENER'S PSALM

IN the Spring a man with a garden
Is a god about to create.
He poreth over seed catalogues with a holy joy.
He gazeth at brown earth with beneficent
countenance.
He is gentle to earth-worms.
He suffereth back-aches gladly.
He buyeth many spades and rakes.
He sniffeth the dinner from afar.
He trampeth dirt through door-ways.
He is a god in last year's overalls.

GYPSY HEAVEN

WHEN all the seasons forming life have passed,
With gifts of rain and trying times of drought,
Till grey-beard Winter seals my sap at last
And I may put no later blossom out.

O Lord, transplant me, not to ordered beds,
Precisely made for cloister-pacing saints;
Where pure and virtuous lilies raise their heads,
But every earthly laughter droops and faints.

On Heaven's outer edge the wild flowers grow,
(I dreamed the place; a stream runs gaily by),
It's there, dear Lord, that I would rather go,
Where I may dance beneath a laughing sky.

THE WIND

THE wind's a rabble-rouser,
Preaching insurrection to the trees.
Puffing himself up, he asks, in a burst of gusty
oratory,
Why all these handsome, clever, up-standing leaves
Are content to stay at home, tied to their mother's
apron-strings,
Instead of travelling and becoming leaves of the
world.

When they hear this,
All the leaves
Rise on their toes and cheer,
Clapping their hands,
And waving their green hats.

They do not know that later
His voice will lose its cooing seductiveness,
And becoming cold and stern,
Will order them to march before him in all their
beauty,
Gold, honey-coloured and amber,
Red, orange, and bronzy-brown,
Like a flock of footless tropical birds.

PRAISE

MY heart is a song-book, Lord, today,
Singing a mood not grave nor gay;

But thankfulness for all your grace;
For trees new-clothed in living lace;

For sap's resurgent, vital wine;
For glossy leaf and gleaming vine;

For ferns that bow their curly hoods
Above the dead in naked woods.

Translated into clumsy words
Are all Your buds and all Your birds.

The croak of frogs, the drone of bees,
The sea-like sound of wind in trees.

Even the snail's uncadent song,
Where through the grass he trails along—

All in his shelly armour clad,
To make some snailly damsel glad.

I write with care in this my book,
That all may read who like to look;

To all things living I express
For copyrights, my gratefulness.

"HE PRAYETH BEST—"

LORD in the morning, when I wake,
Let me, I pray, for man's dear sake,
Open my mouth in joy and sing
The praises of some ugly thing.
Easy it is for those who see
Thy shining face, to honour thee;
So give me eyes for ugliness,
Although I love Thy loveliness.
For why should Beauty be adored,
And lesser-lovely things abhorred?
Dost Thou not own them just the same,
And stamp them with Thy Holy Name?
Then why should I, with changeful heart,
Ascribe to one the better part?

A NOTE OF SPRING MUSIC

THERE'S music on the mountain,
There's music on the lake,
There's music under every tree
Where shadows dream and wake;
In every heart the flutes of Spring
A gleeful music make.

Hear the shaken bells of youth,
As they ring together !
Strings of joy are set athrill
Freed of Winter's tether;
But, oh, the honeyed vows of love
In this magic weather !

Now the murmur of a shell,
Now the voice of fire;
Was ever sweeter music plucked
From Apollo's lyre?
Could the lute of Orpheus
Stir such wild desire?

THE SONG OF YORICK

LIVE with a laugh on your lips,
Live with a smile in your eye.
Those who have jested a life-time
Are never afraid to die.

A soul that is bright as a candle
Is never alone in the dark;
An arrow that's feathered with courage
Will never fly wide of the mark.

Sing when you might be weeping.
Jeer at the villain despair.
Steal, when your coat is ragged,
Robes that a god might wear.

The world may count you fool,
But a fool with laughing eyes
Is wiser far than the gloomy sage
Who paves his road with sighs.

LOVE QUERY

DO I believe your love is true ?

While dew-drops pearl the grass, I do.
While nine witch-maidens weave a shroud;
While seven cuckoos shout aloud;
While, five, quick stars across the sky,
Record their silver tale and die;
While three tall lilies bud and bloom,
With beauty wreathing beauty's tomb;
While one slim candle keeps alight
Her transient blossom through the night;
While still this crimson stains the rose,
Our book of love will never close.

POTPOURRI

FROM gentle seekers flowers never hold
Their hidden wine or store of downy gold.

The lilies yield to bees their amber dew,
Ungrudged as I now give my love to you.

Remember always! Hive this fragrant day
As winged prospectors hoard the dust of May;

So when the years, with winter-weighted feet,
Annul the rose, your thoughtful days are sweet.

HAVEN

NOT when the moon is full,
Not when the moon is slim,
Dear, do I love you most,
But when my lamp is dim.

When night draws down and darkens,
And fears around me throng,
My paling spirit hearkens
To solace in your song.

Not from your eager tongue,
Do I my comfort glean,
But underneath the words,
Is that on which I lean.

When my hands are empty,
And weary is my will,
Then my heart beats stronger,
To know you love me still.

RELENTLESS JOURNEY

"**B**ELOVED," she cried, in agony and tears;
"How could I bear it if you left me ever? . . .
"O the long journey down the lonely years !"

He answered soothingly, his hand in hers,
"Be still, my darling, I will leave you never."

And the gods murmured, laughing in their sleeves,
"But still he shall—before the trees have leaves.
As the earth rouses from its winter sleep,
He sets sail outward for an unknown deep;
And she for comfort, in her heart shall keep
A shining memory and a ghost that grieves."

CURTAIN

IT seems so strange now he is dead,
My lips should still be red,
Still warm and full, as when he kissed them last,
And now his kissing time is past.

And my hair, too, is just as soft and brown
As when he laid his eyelids down
To shut the world out, with its care,
Beyond the curtain of my hair.

How moved so softly with his blade,
The Reaper, in the growing weather?
To cut down Love and I not fade
When we so close were twined together?

DISENCHANTMENT

WITH subtle charm of mellow rhyme,
He bound me fast in a dreamy spell.
The fateful sisters wove, and time
Unravelled till I loved him well.

The shuttle made our love the thread,
And spun a snare around us two;
A sudden break,—and love was dead,
And joy was gone like sunrise dew.

Only echoes of chanted words
Sound like bells from an unseen shore.
The nomad wings of the choiring birds
Of love are gone, to come no more.

GOLDEN ASHES

THOUGH the world has built me a house of gold;
Wonderful, none can match it;
Although the house has a door of jade
With silver to latch it;

Yet the fire is sullen, the hearth is cold
And no one is caring.
In vain are riches, useless is fame,
If no one is sharing.

Nobody comes with a light in his eyes,
To kindle the embers;
Alone in the house with my fame and gold,
All days are December's.

NIRVANA

IF I could be like the clover,
Patient and still;
Turning from fevered pleasures;
Resigning my will;

Folding my hands together
Softly in prayer,
As clover leaves are folded
From evening air.

Then I might weave a poem
On mystic loom;
Delicate, fresh and simple
As clover bloom—

If I could sweep me bare
With God's great broom.

SONNET

ALL night I hear the ceaseless drip of rain,
And long for you with every drop that falls.
How many times we heard the wind complain,
And laughed for joy behind these quiet walls.

At dawn I wake, and call you as I wake;
The listening dark records, but gives no sign.
Your name's an echo blown across a lake,
That finds no ear for resting-place, save mine.

The very walls that seemed so kindly then,
Are prison-bars bereft of love and you;
And Brother Rain that chanted love's amen,
Now joins the wind to wail a long adieu:

But wait ! the rain may bear his loving voice;
'No tears, my sweet. Remember, and rejoice !'

THE FLAME

OUT of the dark he came
To be my lover;
Seeing in me a flame
He would discover.

Ah, beautiful wings, but frail;
No legend warned;
Flickered the light . . . grew pale
And the candle mourned.

SONNET

○ LOVE, Love, Love, I never knew your deeps,
Full flowed your tide, but ebbcd again too soon.
Only for me the yearly dial now keeps
A barren April and a flowerless June.

Of all our roses that you gathered, Death,
Where are the garlands? Do you bind your brows
With those sweet prisons of a summer's breath;
Those silent partners of my true love's vows?

When each new Summer with its flowers came,
Our every tryst seemed sweeter than the last;
But how much fiercer would have burned Love's
flame
If we had known the sands were running fast !

What is the tinder beggared of the spark?
No light have I to hide me from the dark.

EARTH - BOUND

IT'S not that I'm forgetful;
I love you dearly still,
But the ever-green tendrils of laughter
Grief cannot kill.

For oh, my dear, remember,
My body glows with blood,
While yours, like a rained-on ember
Is quenched in a deathly flood.

No bar is death, I know,
To heart's communion;
Beyond his door our spirits have
A closer union.

So while I clasp the earth
With earthy zest for living,
Will you stay constant, love, and be,
When I'm dead too, forgiving?

NEW GROWTH

IS this not good, O heart?
Quiet without and within.
In this small garden space,
Waiting for Spring to begin.

All, all the wild grief is past;
The storm is over,
And peace wells up at last,
With the new clover.

All wounds are healed by time;
Gone is the winter's pain.
Life is renewed by faith,
As earth by rain.

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